



## Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller Remarks on Women's Day Basketball Event

Palace of Sports, Bishkek  
March 5, 2010



*Ambassador Gfoeller with basketball player , 03/05/2010*

Good afternoon. First, I want to thank the Basketball Federation for their work in organizing this game and to thank Director of the State Agency on Sports and Physical Culture Aidarbek Kerimkulov for joining me here today.

It brings me great pleasure, as the U.S. Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan and as a woman, to congratulate each woman present here, especially the basketball players, on International Women's Day! We decided to mark International Women's Day this year with a friendship basketball game between our two nations, to celebrate the strength and vitality of women.

Women's basketball was first played at Smith College in the United States in 1892 and quickly grew to be one of the most popular sports for women in the United States and throughout the world. However, female athletes in the U.S. did not always have the same opportunities and resources in sports as their male counterparts. It was not until 1972 that the United States adopted a law that revolutionized women's sports. That law was Title IX of the

Educational Amendments, and it mandated that educational institutions provide equal opportunities and equal funding for women's sports and extracurricular activities. Title IX made a huge impact in women's sports. In fact, many of the most famous and successful women athletes in the U.S. today attribute their success to the opportunities afforded by Title IX. I am proud of my country for taking action to ensure that young girls have equal opportunities to play sports because sports contribute to healthy self-esteem, a sense of team-work, and instill in young people the importance of playing fair.

Because we realize the positive impact sports can have on society, the U.S. government and the Kyrgyz government have, over the past year, intensified cooperation in the area of sports. Today's tournament comes on the heels of the first Kyrgyz-American Friendship basketball tournament, which was played in November between the men's teams. We have also built new sports facilities for the Kyrgyz armed forces, bought sports equipment for our pilot American schools in all the oblasts of the country, and conducted sports camps for young people. Nearly two years ago, we invited Sam Perkins, a famous NBA player, to conduct master classes in basketball. We also had the honor of inviting a female professional basketball player to Kyrgyzstan to conduct master classes for girls – Becky Bonner of the Women's NBA (WNBA).

This year I hope to increase sports cooperation specifically for women and girls. It is my dream that young women in Kyrgyzstan will be inspired and empowered by sports. And to the young university players here today, I have already heard so much about your accomplishments! You probably have no idea what an inspiration you are to young girls who watch you play. Keep up the good work!

So, it is very fitting that we meet here today to celebrate both women's day and women in sports! Let the games begin! Play hard, play fair, and always remember to be good role models for younger women and girls!